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JAPAN

Yoshio KODAMA

Rightist Leader

Yoshio Kodama, notorious since the 1920's for his connections with right-wing and underworld groups, is widely reported to have high-level connections within the Liberal-Democratic Party (LDP) and has been described by many sources as a powerful figure in behind-the-scenes political maneuvering and one of the real "strong men" of present-day Japan. He has been reported for some years to be closely associated with Ichiro Kono, a leading contender for the LDP presidency and resultant prime ministership, and with Bamboku Ono, LDP Vice President, both of whom are themselves in possession of somewhat unsavory reputations. In February 1963 Kodama figured in rumors of scandals in the negotiations to normalize relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK). These rumors concerned the acceptance of large sums of money and participation in irregular business transactions on the part of LDP leaders, particularly Ono, in return for their efforts to promote successful conclusion of the talks. The nature of Kodama's involvement in the Japan-ROK negotiations has not been detailed, but according to several sources, he is close to former ROK intelligence chief Kim Chong-p'il and has been an important channel from Kim to the LDP and the Japanese government. A Japanese newspaper correspondent has alleged that Kodama was responsible for arranging Ono's December 1962 trip to Korea and had persuaded Ono and Kono to go along with the Japan-ROK agreement.



(1954)

Kodama was born on 18 February 1911 in Fukushima prefecture to a family considered of the samurai rank. He received his primary schooling in Tokyo and in Seoul, Korea, where he resided for a time with a sister. For two years, while working in a factory in Korea, he attended the Zenrin Commercial School at night. This ended his formal schooling, but he continued his education through private study on his own initiative and is widely read in the social sciences. Greatly influenced by leading Japanese nationalist writers, he soon became active in Bin Akao's Kenkoku Kai (National Construction Society).

In 1929 he was arrested for presenting a petition to Emperor Hirohito for unemployment relief and protesting the formation of a leftist party and was imprisoned until late 1930. Upon his release, he again became active in various nationalist and right-wing organizations and was arrested on several occasions during police roundups of rightists. Together with several other young ultranationalists, Kodama founded the Dokuritsu Seinen Sha (Independent Youth Society) in 1932. After the discovery of an alleged plot to assassinate various high-level politicians, however, he was again arrested in November 1932 and imprisoned until 1937.

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Yoshio KODAMA (cont.)

In October 1937 Kodama began a series of trips to northern China as a special staff official of the Foreign Ministry's Information Bureau. After his return from the first of these trips, he organized the Taishi Mondai Kaiketsu Kokumin Domei (China Problems Settlement National League), aimed at promoting Japanese activity in China. (With unofficial backing from the Foreign Ministry, Kodama spent the next few years working with the Taishi Mondai Kaiketsu Kokumin Domei and other nationalist groups on China, making frequent trips to Shanghai.) In December 1941 he set up a purchasing agency in Shanghai for the Japanese Naval Air Force. This agency, later named the Kodama Kikan (Kodama Organ), involved considerable black market procurement as well as alleged intelligence responsibilities, and reportedly enabled Kodama to amass a huge personal fortune through wartime trade with both the Nationalists and the Communists. His wartime activities also included an unsuccessful attempt at election to the Japanese Diet in 1942, management of the right-wing newspaper Yamato Shimbun in 1943, and the assumption of the presidency of the Nichinan Kogyo (Japan Southern Mining Company, Ltd.), as well as several other mines, in 1944. In August 1945 he was appointed a member of the Cabinet Advisory Council in the Higashikuni cabinet, but he was arrested the following December and detained in Sugamo Prison as a Class A war criminal suspect. Released in December 1948, he remained in purge status until the end of the occupation in 1952.

Under the purge restrictions Kodama was prohibited from open participation in political activity, but he was rumored to be connected with a number of nationalist groups and involved in considerable behind-the-scenes political maneuvering. He reportedly maintained close connections with a variety of influential leaders, in particular with Liberal Party (LP) leader Ichiro Hatoyama, who was to become prime minister in 1954, and to Mamoru Shigemitsu, wartime foreign minister who later occupied the same position under Hatoyama. Kodama's connection with Hatoyama and Shigemitsu began in Sugamo Prison, and he allegedly was a major source of funds to the LP through Hatoyama. He reportedly was able to exploit his access to top government officials and his inside information on government policy in various profitable financial transactions. By March 1953 Kodama was described as having regained the ground lost after the war and to be once again the undisputed leader of the Japanese right, a position which he still holds, according to various sources.

Kodama was first reported to be close to Ichiro Kono in early 1957, and this association has apparently been continued up to the present time, with Kodama working to further Kono's political ambitions. A recent unconfirmed report states that Kodama has been actively campaigning to win all rightists over to his side, a maneuver which some of the rightists suspected was an attempt to solidify Kono's position as a prime ministerial candidate by decreasing the power of anti-Kono rightists. In October 1962 Kono reportedly requested that Kodama

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arrange a dinner with as many prominent Japanese rightists as possible so that Kono could attempt to correct their impression that he is too favorably inclined toward the USSR and Communist China.

In addition to his associations with prominent LDP figures, Kodama reportedly has numerous underworld connections and has been closely associated with gambling and gangster groups such as the Matsuba Kai (Pine Leaves Society), the Kokusui Kai (Japan National Essence Association), and the Gijin Association (presumably the Japan Just Men's Party, Nippon Gijinto). He reportedly has been attempting to bring these and other gangster groups under the control of the Toa Doshikai, which he personally heads.

Kodama has been married twice. In 1935 he married his first wife; this marriage ended in divorce, and in 1940 he married for the second time. As of 1952 he had a son and a daughter, born in approximately 1943 and 1946, respectively, by his second marriage. He is thought to be fluent in some dialect of spoken Chinese. Kodama's autobiography, translated into English under the title I Was Defeated, has been a best-seller.

15 October 1963